

# School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success

## Four Clusters of Competence

These are the competencies – or consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking – needed for school turnaround leader success. They were derived by “mapping” the cross-sector research on turnaround leader actions to high-quality competency studies of successful entrepreneurs and leaders in large organizations.<sup>7</sup> The competencies chosen fit the activities that turnaround leaders share with leaders in these other contexts. Validation, refinement and further customization of these competencies will be possible as the number of successful school turnarounds grows and comparisons among more and less successful school turnaround leaders are possible. These competencies are arranged into four clusters of related capabilities.

**Driving for Results Cluster** – This cluster of competencies is concerned with the turnaround leader’s strong desire to achieve outstanding results and the task-oriented actions required for success. Competencies in this cluster include:

- ☐ **Achievement:** The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers.
- ☐ **Initiative and Persistence:** The drive and actions to do more than is expected or required in order to accomplish a challenging task.
- ☐ **Monitoring and Directiveness:** The ability to set clear expectations and to hold others accountable for performance.
- ☐ **Planning Ahead:** A bias towards planning in order to derive future benefits or to avoid problems.

**Influencing for Results Cluster** – This cluster of competencies is concerned with motivating others and influencing their thinking and behavior to obtain results. Turnaround leaders cannot accomplish change alone, but instead must rely on the work of others. Competencies in this cluster include:

- ☐ **Impact and Influence:** Acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking and actions of others.
- ☐ **Team Leadership:** Assuming authoritative leadership of a group for the benefit of the organization.
- ☐ **Developing Others:** Influence with the specific intent to increase the short and long-term effectiveness of another person.

**Problem Solving Cluster** – This cluster of competencies is concerned with leader’s thinking applied to organization goals and challenges. It includes analysis of data to inform decisions; making clear logical plans that people can follow; and ensuring a strong connection between school learning goals and classroom activity. Competencies in this cluster include:

- ☐ **Analytical Thinking:** The ability to break things down in a logical way and to recognize cause and effect.
- ☐ **Conceptual Thinking:** The ability to see patterns and links among seemingly unrelated things.

**Showing Confidence to Lead** – This competency, essentially the public display of self-confidence, stands alone and is concerned with staying visibly focused, committed, and self-assured despite the barrage of personal and professional attacks common during turnarounds.

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- ☐ **Self-Confidence:** A personal belief in one’s ability to accomplish tasks and the actions that reflect that belief.

<sup>7</sup> Competencies selected from *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, Spencer and Spencer (1993). Leader actions from *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organization Improvement*, Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement (2007) and *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*, Public Impact for the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006).